

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 20, 2004

CONTACT: Mark Bayer

Michal Freedhoff

(202) 225-2836

Markey Demands Report on Missing Nuclear Materials *Missing Fuel Rods at Nuclear Power Plant Raise 'Dirty Bomb' Concerns*

Washington, DC: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the panel which oversees nuclear power regulation, today released a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding the missing segments of spent nuclear fuel rods at the decommissioning Humboldt Nuclear Powerplant:

"Once again the material that could be fashioned by terrorists into a 'dirty bomb' seems to have disappeared from a secure nuclear facility right here in the United States," said Rep. Markey. We all share the hope of reactor's licensee that the missing fuel rod segments are not missing but are merely the victim of 'conflicting documentation'; but hope will do nothing to ensure the security of these materials."

The report of missing spent fuel rod segments from the Humboldt nuclear power plant is the third such event in just over 3 years. Rep. Markey sent several letters to the NRC regarding spent fuel rods that went missing from the Millstone nuclear reactor in Connecticut (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_ltr001220.pdf, http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_terrorism_ltr011204.pdf). After an extensive investigation that cost \$9 million, the licensee concluded that the fuel rods in this matter were "somewhere" – perhaps in South Carolina, perhaps in Washington State, perhaps still in Connecticut. The NRC then concluded that even though it had no idea where the fuel rods were, they did not pose a public health risk to anyone. Despite that fact that the rods were never found, the NRC fined the plant operator only \$288,000 for its lax nuclear materials accounting and oversight.

A second incident was then reported to have occurred at Entergy's Vermont Yankee power plant in Vernon Vermont, and Rep. Markey wrote the NRC on April 22, 2004 to request an explanation of what happened. (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_dirtybombs_ltr040422.pdf)

In its June 24, 2004 Vermont Yankee response (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_dirtybombs_resp040624.pdf), the NRC stated that:

- "if radioactive material typical of a fuel rod segment were used in a dirty bomb, the radioactive material could contaminate an area of a few city blocks or more, depending on the size of the explosive, the amount of radioactive material used, and weather conditions."
- the last time Vermont Yankee physically verified the whereabouts of the missing spent fuel pieces was January 1980, and
- In 1988, the NRC stopped inspecting storage of spent nuclear fuel in order to allocate its resources to matters it felt were more "risk-significant". It did not resume these inspections until after September 11, 2001.

The Vermont Yankee fuel rod segments were subsequently located in the spent fuel pool even though 2 robotic searches of the pool failed to find them.

"The NRC continually responds to such cases of missing radioactive materials with a laissez-faire attitude, telling the public that they're probably lying around 'somewhere'," said Rep. Markey. When will the NRC realize that "somewhere" could end up being in a dirty bomb detonated in the middle of an American city? It is time for the NRC to crack down on those responsible for these materials, implement new security regulations, and impose high penalties for those who don't comply."

Rep. Markey is the author of the Dirty Bomb Prevention Act and has repeatedly attempted to prod the NRC into action on the problem of unaccounted-for dirty bomb materials, such as the case of 8 missing highly radioactive cesium sources. For more information on the Dirty Bomb Prevention Act, a copy of the letter sent to the NRC today and the problem of missing dirty bomb materials, please go to <http://www.house.gov/markey/dirtybombs.htm>.

#